

œuvres of the politicians; for months the country was permitted to hear of nothing but patriotic junketings and speeches, "passed by the Censor," overflowing with the raptures of "the Black Northerns" at the discovery of the charms of "the Sunny South to the advances of the dour men of the Black North—all purely for exportation to "the U.S." As a precaution against any premature disclosure of the truth, the business meetings of the Convention were held in private, and any report of their secret sittings, any comment or even any "reference" to them in speech or newspaper was declared a crime under the Defence of the Realm Act. The impatience of the country was sought to be allayed by not over-candid

assurances from Sir Horace Plunkett in his banquetting speeches from time to time that all was going well. "The U.S." had to be kept amused by such romantic scene-painting and by the band for many months before the curtain could finally be lifted and then only to exhibit the actors scurrying off the stage, like as many poor ghosts at cockcrow. The realities of the drama were going on in America itself, where England was playing for the soul of President Wilson. In the Ireland of real life the Volunteers were silently arming and drilling their battalions, paying but a contemptuous attention to the love-feasts of the politicians in Mr. Lloyd George's "Irish Convention."

(To be continued.)

There, upon a bed of straw, in a humble manger, lay the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and the glory on His countenance shone forth divinely. He smiled upon us tenderly—think of it, my friends!—smiled on us, lowly, ignorant shepherds, and we sank to the ground in humble adoration and love. Moments passed while we knelt in mute adoring, and time for us hath ceased to be; but once again the angel spoke to us, commanding us to arise.

"Go back to the flocks, ye shepherds. Ye shall find them safe in the fold; and forget not that this night ye have looked on the face of God."

Nasson paused. "I have finished, my friends," he said, glancing round at his listeners, who were all so silent because of the strangeness and wonder of his story.

Slowly they got to their feet, and in quietness passed homewards.

### III.

Amongst the crowd of listeners was Nasson's brother, a lad of fifteen years of age, who had followed the strange narrative with the most eager attention. Scarcely had the people left the house than he drew close to his brother, and with a world of longing in his large dark eyes he stretched forth his hands towards Nasson.

"Oh! Nasson," he cried, "take me, I beseech thee, to Bethlehem, there to adore the new-born King, the Messiah, for my heart seems nigh to burst with longing."

"Alas!" answered Nasson, "that I cannot do; the place where the Babe lies I could not again find, for it is hidden from men. Never could I have reached it only for the guidance of the angels of the Lord, and when I got back to my flock on the hillside, I knew not where lay the place whence I had just come."

Gideon bowed his head sorrowfully.

"Oh! Nasson," he said fervently, "would that I had been blessed as thou, to look on the face of my God."

That night, as Gideon lay on his humble pallet, his thoughts concentrated on the new-born Redeemer, and wishing with all his heart and soul that he, like Nasson, had had the happiness of being led by the angels to the Crib of the Infant Saviour, a brilliant radiance suddenly illuminated the little chamber, and the rustle of wings fell on his ears.

"Peace be with thee, Gideon, the pure of heart! Thou hast found favor with the Lord," said the voice of an angel close to his side. "Art thou willing to give up thy dearest possessions," continued the angel, "and gain thy desire—to gaze on the face of thy God?"

"Oh! yes, yes," answered Gideon, "everything I have—even to my life—I am willing to surrender for one look on the Face of the new-born King of Kings."

"Then, Gideon, thy wish shall be granted; but, having looked at God, never shalt thou see aught else. Blind wilt thou be ever after. Art thou willing?"

"Blind let me be, then," Gideon replied. "What matters it when I have gazed on the God of Gods!"

"Come, then," said the angel.

Gideon found himself carried gently

## A Complete Story

### Gideon's Vision

#### A Tale of the Nativity

(By BEE BEARY in the *Irish Catholic*.)

#### I.

It was the seventh day after the birth of the Messiah. Bethlehem and the surrounding country still lay fast locked in the grip of a severe snowstorm. In the ditches and by the roadsides the snow lay in high drifts, blown thither by the cutting wind that whistled shrilly through the leafless branches, causing the feathery flakes upon them to scatter in confusion. On that day the Divine Child had received the holy name of Jesus, although His Virgin Mother and St. Joseph, owing to the severity of the weather, had much difficulty in making their way to the Temple.

The shepherds, those first and most privileged worshippers of God made man, had long since returned to their flocks on the hillsides and valleys, though still somewhat dazed from the wonders they had seen and heard. One of the shepherds, by name Nasson, arrived at his home in a little hamlet about twelve miles from Bethlehem, late on the evening of the Circumcision, and after he had rested and refreshed himself he began to relate the strange happenings that had taken place on the eve of Christmas. The dwellers in the hamlet had heard faint whispers of the birth of the long-promised Redeemer, but, as they had only a very confused account of the matter, they were most eager to hear all Nasson could tell them, so they crowded into his house-place to listen to all the wondrous things in which he had taken a part.

#### II.

"It was midnight on the eve of Christmas, my friends," Nasson began, "and the heavens sparkled with myriads of twinkling stars. Snow had fallen earlier in the day, but afterwards it had frozen over, till now at the midnight hour the world lay hidden under a glittering cloak of frosted snow, shining like a silver veil in the starlight. My flocks huddled together for warmth under the shelter of the hillside, and I sat wrapped in my sheepskin mantle, watching.

"Suddenly the deep silence of the night

was broken by the sound of a thousand voices singing high in the heavens above me, while the music of countless harps fell sweetly on the sleeping world. I looked up in wonder, my friends, when lo! the heavens opened wide, and through clouds of golden glory a radiant host came forth. *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, and peace to men, sang this angelic choir, till I thought my heart stood still with terror, and I bowed my head in fear. "Look up! look up!" a voice commanded, and tremblingly I obeyed.

"Nasson, arise," said an angel hovering in the air above me, "go thou in haste to Bethlehem, for there this night is born the Messiah, come to redeem the world. Thou wilt find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger; follow, and we shall lead the way."

"I immediately obeyed the angel, and followed swiftly after the heavenly host, who kept hovering right above me all through the journey till we arrived at the end. Other shepherds joined me from time to time, and we listened in awe and wonder to the melody of the angels of the Lord. Finally we came to a half-ruined stable, almost hidden under the weight of snow on the sagging roof, and right over this the hosts of the Lord hovered motionless and silent for a few moments. Then they burst forth again into singing, and the heavenly harps took up the strain, till the volume of their melody filled the air, echoing and re-echoing through the surrounding hills. We shepherds shook with terror, and cast ourselves upon our knees, our faces touching the frozen earth.

"Lift up your faces, oh! ye shepherds, and fear not," said a voice over our heads, and tremblingly did so. "Enter and adore the new-born King, the Messiah. He Who is its redemption, has come into the world," continued the voice, and obeying the heavenly messenger we arose and drew near the open door.

"Oh! my friends," continued Nasson, "never, never shall we forget that which our eyes were privileged to look upon.

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